

# Miners and developers to benefit from offset options

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MINERS and other developers of major projects that cause environmental damage will find it easier to gain approval under a government policy that gives them greater flexibility to offset the impacts.

Developers of projects such as mines and housing will no longer have to find and buy land similar to that which is damaged or destroyed to achieve so-called “biodiversity offsets”.

Instead, companies will be able to contribute to a fund established by the NSW government.

The fund will identify suitable offsets for miners and developers and provide payments to landowners who wish to take part in suitable biodiversity projects, including rehabilitation of mine sites.

Landholders will earn offset credits that can be sold to developers and miners.

Developers of big projects also will be allowed for the first time to contribute to “supplementary measures” such as paying for research or a program that benefits native species if no suitable offsets are available.

The most controversial aspect of the draft policy – the opportunity to reduce the value of the required offset if a project’s social or economic benefit is deemed significant enough, known as “discounting” – has been dumped.

Planning Minister Pru Goward said the policy would “cut red tape throughout the planning process and encourage sustainable investment in NSW because it provides certainty for stakeholders”.

Environment Minister Rob Stokes said the policy would “enable a more strategic approach to offsetting”.

“The fund will ease the burden on proponents by letting them make payments towards their offset, instead of finding offset sites themselves.”

But Nature Conservation Council chief executive Kate Smolski said it was “the latest in a string of concessions to the powerful mining and developer lobbies”.

Ms Smolski said the planning system allowed for inadequate offsets and the policy did little to address this.